



PHIL BRYANT  
GOVERNOR

March 20, 2017

Montana Legislature  
PO Box 201706  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Members of the Montana Legislature:

As Governor of the State of Mississippi, I write in support of high-quality early childhood education opportunities that House Bill 563 would establish.

Early childhood programs for low-income four-year-olds open the doors of opportunity to the most vulnerable children in our communities. These programs give them a chance to enter school ready to learn, drastically improve their chances of academic success in elementary and high school and will guarantee they have the tools they need to enter the workforce. Investing in a Montana preschool grant program will ultimately create stronger, safer and more economically vibrant communities.

In 2013, Mississippi's Legislature established policy to address early learning as a mechanism to improve educational outcomes across our educational system. The Mississippi *Literacy-Based Promotion Act* ended the practice of "socially promoting" third graders who were not proficient in reading. Under this general umbrella, we also developed the *Early Learning Collaborative Act*, whose goal is to ensure every child is ready to learn by kindergarten. Our state leaders learned the importance of building an early childhood system to assist licensed child care centers and prekindergarten programs. Since an initial investment by Mississippi's business community and funding from state dollars, we have significantly improved kindergarten readiness for our most at-risk students. Statewide, the average score on the 2016 Kindergarten Readiness Assessment for the 10,000 students who attended PreK is nine points above the average of students who did not. Mississippi was one of only two states whose fourth graders showed substantial improvement on the 2015 National Assessment of Education Process reading tests. These investments in the early years have helped our students attain better outcomes.

I urge you to consider the continuum of learning these education reforms provide and their long-term benefits. Good policy addresses a real issue within the context of the state and is built on evidence-based principles. Quality early childhood education has proven itself a sound economic investment in our children and in the future of our state.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Phil Bryant, written in a cursive style.

Phil Bryant  
Governor

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